Resources

Vishnudharmottara Purana (Art and Architecture)
by Bhagyashree Sarma | 2021 | 59,457 words
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This page relates 'Materials for the Construction of Temple' of the study on the elements of Art and Architecture according to the Vishnudharmottara Purana: an ancient text whose third book deals with various artisan themes such as Architecture, Painting, Dance, Grammar, etc. Many chapters are devoted to Hindu Temple architecture and the iconography of Deities and their installation rites and ceremonies.

4. Materials for the Construction of Temple

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Finding of proper types of materials is one of the important aspects for any construction. In the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa*, the selection of appropriate materials to construct a temple is recommended with importance. The procedure of the selection of materials for a temple is elaborately discussed under the 89th, 90th, 91st and 92nd chapters of the *Tṛtīyakhaṇḍa* of the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa* which have been taken for discussion here.

a) Selection of Wood:

In the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa*, the architect is suggested to go to the forest to collect appropriate wood for temples in an auspicious day after taking advice from an astrologer.[1] The woods of the trees which are hollow from inside, which bear creepers, which are eaten by worms, slightly burnt by fire, ruined by wind are totally discarded for making temples.[2] Moreover, the trees which are used as the abode of birds, animals, ascetics etc. should be totally abandoned in this purpose.[3] The trees growing in a *śmaśāna*, temple, ant hill, road or which is the only tree of a garden should not be cut for making temples and they should be left with care.[4] Here, the eco friendly suggestions of *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa* are seen to protect the greenery and to balance a pollution free environment.

Moreover, the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa* gives importance in saving the useable trees and that is why the trees viz., Palāsa, Kovidāra, Śālmalī, Pippala, Vaṭa, Āmra, Puṣpaka, Kapittha, Vibhītaka, Vetasa etc. are advised not to be cut[5] as these trees and their fruits are very essential for livelihood.

According to the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa*, the woods of some particular trees remain beneficial for the construction of temples.

These are—

1. Nandana,
2. Syandana,
3. Śāla,
4. Śiṃśapa,
5. Khadira,
6. Dhava,
7. Kiṃśuka,
8. Padmaka,
9. Haridrā,
10. Cīnaka,
11. Arjuna,
12. Kadamba,
13. Madhūka,
14. Añjana,
15. Devavṛkṣa,
16. Jātyā and
17. Raktasandana.[6]

At the time of cutting the trees one should clean the axe by smearing honey and ghee.[7] After collecting the suitable wood from forest, the architect uses it according to his requirements and purposes.

b) Selection of Stones:

The quality of stones is very important in the construction of temple. Indian scriptures state that to procure the stones, the astrologer and the architect should go to mountain and examine the stones.[8] In the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa* a proper examination of stone is suggested in this regard. The stone used in the Architecture of a temple should be uniform in colour, glossy, underground, massive, soft, broad in size, void of sand, clean and washed in pure water, placed under the shade of trees or it may be lying near a temple.[9] In connection with temple building some specific colours of stones are also recommended. These are-the colour of lotus, flowers, black pepper, kidney bean, pigeon and black bee and as well as the white colour.[10] Moreover, the use of limestone in the construction of temple is suggested in the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa*, but it is not advised for the construction of a house.[11]

The *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa* also suggests about the quality of the stones to be used in a temple. In this regard it specifies that some stones which are purified by fire, heated by sun rays, mixed with saline water, which are damaged, rough and used by unholy people, ruined by cavities, filled with dots and curved lines etc. are to be totally abandoned.[12] Some stones which are occupied by some animals as their abode are also to be avoided for using in temple construction.[13] So, it can be said that in the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa*, the collection of materials for the construction of temple does not suggest any process that harms others.

c) Testing of Bricks:

Iṣṭakā i.e., brick[14] is one of the most important materials in the construction of a temple as it still bears the similar importance even in the modern era. It is a building material which is used to make walls. In ancient time bricks used to be made of clay which were of four kinds viz., *ūṣara*, *pāṇḍura*, *kṛṣṇacikkaṇa* and *tāmraputtaka*.[15] According to the *Mayamata*, *tāmraputtaka* type of clay is the best one for making of bricks.[16]

The procedure of making bricks is very nicely explained in the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa*. The book tells that in the brick making process in the first stage all the clay should be dried up in an auspicious ground and thereafter it should be gently mixed with water and moss.[17] After that the dough of the clay should be shaped in a machine which should be one hand in length, half a hand in breadth and one forth hand in height.[18] In that machine the clay should be baked in the fire of wood, cow-dung and grass and thus bricks got prepared.[19] These bricks should be made in proper shape and be arranged skillfully in proper place. This is important to note that only properly baked bricks are accepted for construction.[20] In the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* also, the reference of baked bricks are found which were used for making fire altars during Vedic time.[21]

d) Preparation *of Vajralepana*:

In ancient time there was a special kind of hard cement, which was known as *vajralepa*[22] and the *vajralepa* was used in construction as well as for joining the bricks. It is nothing but a binding agent. In the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa*, five procedures of preparing the *vajralepa* are suggested.

1) It is incorporated there that the equal portion of some particular objects viz., *bilvaka*, *kapittha*, *āmra*, flower of *śālmalī*, seed of *sallakī*, skin of *dhanvana* and the paste of *vacā* should be boiled in water for eight times till it reduces to one eighth portion of the original value. After that, some more ingredients like *mallakī*, gum of *vatsala*, *bhallātaka*, *bilva*, *kurmuru*, *sarja* and *atasī* are added with the mixture and again boiled properly to make the first variety of *vajralepa*.[23]

2) In the second variety, the mixture *of lākṣā*, *kunduru*, *gṛhadhūma* the middle portion of *kapittha* and *bilva*, *nāgaphala*, *balā*, *madhuka*, *kiñjāpa*, *madana*, *mañjīṣṭhā*, *āmalaka and sarja* should be taken.[24]

3) The third variety of *vajralepa* was the mixture of the horns of bull and buffalo, skin of goat, milk of buffalo, juice of *bimba* and *kapittha*.[25]

4) The fourth kind of *vajralepa* is made by the mixture of some metals like eight parts of *nāga* i.e., tin[26] , two of *kāṃsya* i.e., bell metal and one of *rīti* i.e., rust of iron[27] .[28] In the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*, along with iron rust and bell-metal, *sīsaka* i.e., lead[29] is suggested to be mixed instead of tin for making the glue. It is seen that the portions of the metals, suggested in the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* are similar as stated in the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa*.[30]

5) The last process i.e., fifth procedure of making *vajralepa* refers to its beginning with the baking process of lime and thereafter the moistened lime should be mixed with the skin and milk of cows and rough hair.[31]

FOOTNOTES AND REFERENCES:

[1]: vanapraveśaṃ dharmajña nibodha gadato mama/ śubhe divasanakṣatre muhūrte cābhipūjite// daivajñaṃ purataḥ kṛtvā sthapatiḥ praviśedvanaṃ/ tatastatra parīkṣet cchindyādbhindyādvanaspatīn/ *Ibid*., 3. 89.1-2

[2]: sakoṭarāṃ latābaddhāṃ kṛmijagdhān vivarjayet/ vahninā ca tathā spṛṣṭāṃ pātitāṃ pavanena ca/ kuñjareṇa tathā bhagnāṃ…/ *Ibid*., 3. 89.3-4

[3]: ……pakṣiṇāṃ nilayāśca ye/ tāpasānāṃ samīpe ca……..// sattvānāmāśayā ye ca…..vivarjayet/ *Ibid*., 3. 89.4-5

[4]: śmaśānacaityavalmīkadevatāyatanodbhavāḥ/
udyānajānekavṛkṣānsīmāvṛkṣāṃstathaiva ca/
mārgavṛkṣānmahārāja prayatnena vivarjayet/ *Ibid*., 3. 89.6-7

[5]: *Ibid*.,3.89.7-8

[6]: *Ibid*.,3.89.9-10

[7]: madhvājyāktena rājendra tataḥ paraśunā śuciḥ/ *Ibid*.,3.89.21

[8]: ……gatvā śilāṃ vātha parīkṣayet/ śailaṃ gatvā mahārāja daivajñaḥ stapatistathā/ *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa*, 3.90.1

[9]: ekavarṇāṃ samāṃ snigdhāṃ nimagnāṃ ca tathā kṣitau/ ghātātimātrasphuṭanāṃ dṛḍhāṃ mṛdvīṃ manoramāṃ// komalāṃ sikatāhīnāṃ priyāṃ dṛṅmanasorapi/ saritsalilanirdhṛtāṃ pavitrāṃ tu jaloṣitāṃ// drumacchāyopagūḍhāṃ ca tīrthāśrayasamanvitāṃ/ āyāmapariṇāhāḍhyāṃ grāhyāṃ prāhurmanīṣiṇaḥ// *Ibid*., 3.90.3-5

[10]: śvetaśca padmavarṇaśca kusumoṣaṇasannibhaḥ/ pāṇḍuro mudgavarṇaśca kapoto bhṛṅgasannibhaḥ// *Ibid*., 3.90.21

[11]: sudhāśilānāṃ tridaśādhivāse sudhāśilā naiva gṛheṣu deyā/ *Ibid*.,3.91.15

[12]: agrāhyāṃ jvalanālīḍhā taptāṃ bhāskararaśmibhiḥ/ anyakarmopayuktā ca tathā kṣārāmbusaṃyutāṃ// atyantopahatāṃ rūkṣāmapuṇyajanasevitāṃ/ tilaiḥ sambhṛṣitā yā tu vicitrairbindubhiścitā// rekhāmaṇḍalasaṅkīrṇāṃ viddhāṃ vimalasaṃyutāṃ/ *Ibid*., 3.90.6-8

[13]: *Ibid*., 3.90.9-14

[14]: V.S Apte, *The Student's Sanskrit English Dictionary*, p.96

[15]: ūṣaraṃ pāṇḍuraṃ kṛṣṇacikkaṇaṃ tāmrapullakaṃ mṛdaścatasraḥ/ *Mayamataṃ*, 16.114

[16]: mṛdaścatasrastāsveva gṛhṇīyāt tāmrapullakaṃ/ *Mayamataṃ*, 16.115

[17]: asaṅkīrṇācchubhāddeśādgṛhītvā śoṣayenmṛdam/ śoṣitāṃ tāṃ vimṛdnīyātsaśaivālena cāmbhasā/ *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa*, 3.91.3

[18]: hastadīrgheṇa yantreṇa tadardhavistṛtena ca/ *Ibid*.,3.91.4

[19]: ātape tāstathā śuṣkā vipacennṛpasattama/ kāṣṭhairasārairbhūpāla gokarīṣaistṛṇaistathā/ *Ibid*.,3.91.5

[20]: samyaksaṃyojitā yojyā yathāsthāne narādhipaḥ/ *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa*, 3.91.10

[21]: sā sainaṃ pakveṣṭakā bhūtvāpyapadyate/ tadyadiṣṭātsamabhavastadiṣṭakāstasmādagnineṣṭakāḥ pacanti/ *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa*, 6.1.2.22

[22]: V.S Apte, *The Student's Sanskrit English Dictionary*, p.487

[23]: *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa*, 3.92.1-5

[24]: *Ibid*., 3.92.6-7

[25]: viṣāṇāni gavāṃ rājanmahiṣāṇāṃ tathaiva ca/ ajānāṃ ca tathā carma māhiṣyaṃ gavyameva ca// rasabiṃbakapitthāsu vajralepaḥ prakīrtitaḥ/ *Ibid*., 3.92.8-9

[26]: V.S Apte, *The Student's Sanskrit English Dictionary*, p.283

[27]: *Ibid*., p.470

[28]: aṣṭau bhāgāstu nāgasya kāṃsyabhāgadvayaṃ tathā/ rītibhāgaṃ ca kathito vajralepastathaiva ca// *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa*, 3.92.9-10

[29]: V.S Apte, *The Student's Sanskrit English Dictionary*, p.604

[30]: aṣṭau sīsakabhāgāḥ kāṃsasva dvau tu rītikābhāgaḥ/ *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*, 57.8

[31]: sudhāpakvā tataḥ klinnā gavyacarmasamanvitā/ khararomayutā rājanvajralepastathaiva ca/ *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa*, 3.92.10-11

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